

U.N. PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES, 13th Session, Item 9
International Year of Indigenous Languages in the Future Work of the PFII
 May 04, 2017

Statement from: **Indigenous Languages Caucus**, Richard A. Grounds, Ph.D. Chair

Honorable Chairperson:

[*Indigenous language greeting in Yuchi language by Richard A. Grounds, Ph.D., recognizing the traditional caretakers of this land and offering appreciation to PFII members past and present who are providing so much support for our Indigenous languages.*]

I am Dr. Richard A. Grounds, speaking to you in our Yuchi language that now has only three remaining elderly speakers who grew up with Yuchi as their first language.

However, by using face-to-face immersion methods between youth and Elders, we have now been able to grow 12 new young speakers of Yuchi language who are fluent enough to teach the generations coming behind them. In fact, my grandson is now the first child raised in the Yuchi language in almost 70 years.
 yUdjEhanAno^ so^ KAnAno^ (We Yuchi People are still here!)

I mention these references to our Yuchi Elders and youth both as an example of the dire global crisis for our Indigenous languages and also to demonstrate that we can indeed breath new life into our God-given languages all around the world, so that our original languages will be revitalized and the cultural health of our Indigenous communities will be strengthened. In fact, according to projections by linguistic researchers, 90% of the world's languages (almost 6,800 languages) will fall silent during the lifetime of my grandson—unless steps are taken to change the path to demise.

And that is why we are so excited about the announcement of the U.N. International Year of Indigenous Languages in 2019 that we have been proposing since the beginning of this Forum.
 gOchathla gO'wAdAnAha k'@bE dOCHw@chE zAdOsh@nlA thla!

As with all of our work on Indigenous Peoples' issues, the revitalization of Indigenous languages needs to be decolonized.

Indigenous languages cannot be divorced from biological diversity and cultural diversity. Eighty percent of the world's biodiversity,¹ and over 70% of the world's linguistic and cultural diversity is found in Indigenous Peoples' lands and territories.

Research has revealed an extremely high correlation of direct overlap between lands with high ecological diversity and linguistic diversity.

Therefore, the struggle to protect land, water and biological diversity is intrinsically linked to the survival of our Indigenous languages.

The assaults from extractive industries devastating Indigenous Peoples' territories are also devastating our languages. We cannot save our languages without resisting the plundering of our lands, territories and resources. These invasive actions are all expressions of the underlying Doctrine of Discovery.

We speak for the earth. Indeed, our languages come from the earth—from the particular landscapes where our peoples originated.

We offer the following RECOMMENDATIONS from the Indigenous Language Caucus for the International Year of Indigenous Languages:

- + that the Year begin with a series of **Regional Gatherings** in each of the UN Indigenous regions where we celebrate our Indigenous languages through singing, dancing and storytelling and highlighting the learning and contributions of **children and youth**
- + that these Regional Gatherings will also be events for **sharing best practices** in transmitting languages to the coming generations including language nests, other immersion methods, Indigenous language radio, and the limitations of technology for transmitting the richness and beauty of our powerful and living languages
- + that the UN give an **Eminent Elder Award** in each region during each Regional Gathering to recognize their work in Indigenous language revitalization
(and that these Awards be written in the language of the recipient)
- + that all of these Eminent Elders be brought to a **global meeting in Paris at the UNESCO headquarters** in celebration of the survival of our Indigenous languages
- + that an **Indigenous co-facilitator** be designated in consultation with Indigenous Peoples to prepare for and coordinate with UNESCO the International Year of Indigenous Languages.
(to help ensure that the focus, participation and outcomes of the International Year remain focused on benefitting Indigenous Peoples)
- + that UN agencies and processes (including UNICEF and UNESCO) **implement a strategy of triage** to give direct attention to the most critically endangered Indigenous languages

These Recommendations are offered for the intentional actions for the future work of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues for Indigenous languages. We are compelled to speak out on behalf of our languages due to the extreme urgency facing our Indigenous languages and the immeasurable **value of our original languages**. Our Indigenous languages are essential to Indigenous Knowledge, ceremonial life, medicinal practices, and our own identities as Indigenous peoples.

Our languages are the basis for unwritten histories, specialized agronomies, and the understanding of local ecosystems and regional environments. In short, our languages carry our original instructions about our proper way of being in the world and keeping proper relations with other-than-human beings in the circle of life.

gOchathla gO'wAdAnA hElAha Ôk'ajU TahAÔk'âfATA
(Working together we can carry all our languages forward!)

s@nlAk'ayasOTa ("thank you")

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ⁱ https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/publications/GEF_IndigenousPeople_CRA_lores.pdf